



News Release

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Air pollution health risk high for people with heart, lung disease

Be careful about outdoor activities when air quality is poor

OLYMPIA — Nearly everyone likes to spend time outdoors on warm sunny days, but poor air quality can harm people with heart and lung disease. Now, stronger evidence indicates just how dangerous air pollution can be, especially for people in high-risk groups.

In May, the American Heart Association concluded that fine-particle air pollution is linked to cardiovascular disease (heart attack, heart failure, coronary artery disease, and stroke). It can cause [illness and death](#) from these diseases in susceptible people. Even brief exposure, as little as a few hours, can trigger problems. Risks also rise with long-term exposure.

A recent [Department of Ecology analysis](#) estimates that fine particles contribute to about 1,100 deaths and millions of dollars in health-care costs each year in Washington.

Air pollution can be a problem for everybody, but it's especially harmful to people with heart and lung disease. Older adults are also susceptible because they often have these diseases but don't recognize it. New research suggests that breathing fine particle air pollution can also be risky for people who are obese or have diabetes. Children are also vulnerable to polluted air because their lungs are still growing and they spend more time outdoors.

Different things cause summer air pollution. Several consecutive days of hot, sunny weather will increase ozone. Wildfires like the ones that have broken out in central Washington in recent days produce smoky air that contains fine particles and toxic chemicals. Cars and trucks generate exhaust. On calm days when the air is still, air pollutants build up.

This year, El Niño weather patterns meant a relatively dry winter in some parts of the state. Ongoing climate changes are projected to cause additional bad air quality by increasing wildfires and ozone pollution.

— More —

People, especially those in high-risk groups, can lower their exposure to air pollution by checking air quality conditions before taking part in outdoor activities. When air pollution is high, people should limit outdoor activity and choose less strenuous things to do — such as going for a walk instead of a run. People who must work out should reduce the amount of time they spend exercising heavily. Pollution levels are often highest at midday or in the afternoon, so exercising earlier or later may be wise. Indoor exercise is another option. Where vehicle exhaust may be higher, it helps to spend less time in traffic and to avoid exercising near traffic.

Information about [air quality conditions](#) can be found on the state Department of Ecology website or online from one of seven [local clean air agencies](#). Regular e-mail updates on air quality are available by subscribing to the American Lung Association of Washington “[Breathe Easy Network](#).” Color-coded information on these sites puts air quality in different zones going from good (green) to hazardous (maroon). Plan outdoor activities when air quality is in the “good” or green zone.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health website at http://www.doh.wa.gov for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
